

Car Safety for Growing Babies and Toddlers From 4 to 24 Months

Babies and toddlers are safest in the back seat in rear-facing car seats!

Car Seat Basics

- Riding rear facing protects baby's head and neck in a crash.
- Use a rear-facing car safety seat (car seat) as long as possible—as long as your child still fits the car seat's height and weight limits. (Convertible car seats can be used rear facing up to 30 to 50 pounds.) Also, check state laws.
- **NEVER** turn your baby to face forward before his first birthday. For a premature baby, this means waiting until at least one year after the original due date. Longer is better.
- Place your baby in the back seat. The back seat is safer for all children. The center back seat is safest if the car seat can be installed properly there.
- **ALWAYS** read and follow the instructions for the car seat and the car.

What does it mean to ride rear facing?

When riding rear facing, a baby looks toward the back window of the car when riding in the car seat.

Why should my child ride rear facing?

The back of a rear-facing car seat supports a baby or toddler's large head and weak neck. This lowers the chance of serious injury in a crash. Children should ride rear facing as long as they are not too tall or heavy to fit the car seat this way. Check instructions.

My baby rides in a rear-facing-only car seat. When should she move to another type?

A car seat must fit the baby's weight and height. Check the car seat's label and manual for height and weight limits. Baby is too tall when the top of her head is less than one inch from the top of the car seat. When baby becomes too tall or heavy for a rear-facing-only car seat (the type with a carry handle), she can often keep riding rear facing by using a convertible car seat instead. (See page 2 to learn more.)

I have a convertible car seat. How long can my child use it rear facing?

Convertible car seats can be used rear facing by most children for a long time. Check the size limits on labels and in the car seat's instructions. Follow the car seat's rear-facing weight limit. Model weight limits vary from 30 to 50 pounds. Also, the top of the child's head must be at least an inch below the top of the car seat.



A toddler should ride facing the rear until she reaches the maximum rear-facing weight limit or is too tall for her convertible car seat. This child still fits!

Air Bag Danger: Put Baby in Back

A baby riding in the front seat of a car with an air bag is in great danger. An air bag could kill a baby if it hits the back of the car seat. See the car owner's manual and labels to learn about a car's air bags.

Never put a rear-facing car seat in front with an air bag that is on. Cars or pickups with no back seat (or one that is very small) may have a switch to turn off the front air bag. Some cars have a sensor to turn off the air bag. Make sure the air bag is turned off before putting a child in front. Look for a dashboard light to confirm it is off.



An opening air bag can kill a child!

Is it safe for a child who is growing taller to ride rear facing?

A baby or toddler can ride rear facing until his head is one inch from the top of the convertible car seat. It is okay for the legs to touch the seatback and to bend. Long legs are not in danger in this position. In fact, baby's legs are safer when riding rear facing.



Choosing a car seat for a bigger baby



A convertible car seat may be used rear facing until baby is too heavy or tall. Then use it facing forward.

The “best car seat” is one that fits your baby, fits well in your car, and is one you will use correctly every time.

A convertible car seat is bigger than a rear-facing-only car seat. Use this type rear facing up to the car seat’s maximum weight or height. Most have a rear-facing upper weight limit of 30 to 50 pounds. When the child

is too large to ride rear facing by height or weight, follow the instructions to use the car seat forward facing.

Is your baby tall for his age? Choose a car seat with harness straps that can be set high compared to other car seats so that it will fit for a long time. (Take a measuring tape to the store!)

Is your baby heavy for his age? Look for a convertible seat that can be used rear and forward facing up to a high weight. Some forward-facing car seats may be used in harness mode until a child is 65 to 90 pounds, unless he becomes too tall.

Choose a car seat with a harness that is easy for you to adjust. Learn how to make the harness looser and tighter and how to set the straps higher when baby grows.

Try a car seat in the back seat of your car before you buy it. Make sure it fits and can be tightly installed. Try the car seat both rear and forward facing.

Warning: forward-facing-only car seats

Some car seats face forward *only*. Children under age 1 should never use forward-facing-only car seats. Some models allow use beginning at 22 pounds, but it is always safer to keep children who are that size rear facing. Do not use a forward-facing car seat if your child still fits a car seat used rear facing.



Check a second-hand car seat carefully

A used car seat may have hidden safety problems. Most newer car seats are easier to use and have better safety features.

- Make sure any recalls have been repaired and that the seat has all its parts and instructions.
- If the car seat has been in a crash—or if you are not sure it has not—do *not* use it.
- Don’t use a car seat that is too old—many should not be used longer than six years. Check labels and instructions.

Installing a car seat

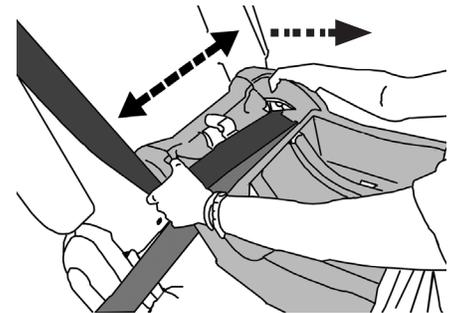
Be sure the car seat is tightly installed in the car. If it is too loose, your child could be seriously hurt in a crash.

Use the seat belt or LATCH strap to attach the car seat tightly. Always read the instructions that come with the car seat. Also read the sections on seat belts, LATCH, air bags, and car seats in your car manual.

Choose LATCH *or* the seat belt. Use whichever gives the tightest fit. *Do not* use both at the same time, unless the car and car seat instructions say it is okay to do that.

To check for a tight fit, hold the car seat where the LATCH strap or seat belt goes through the car seat. Pull forward and side to side. The car seat should not move more than 1 inch.

(Do not grab near the top of a rear-facing car seat to check for tightness. Movement there is okay.)

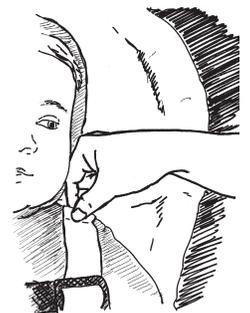


Buckle your baby up snugly

Put the harness straps in the position at or just below your baby’s shoulders when rear facing. Put them at or above the shoulders when forward facing.

Adjust the harness to be snug, so you cannot pinch the strap between your fingers (picture, right). It should lie flat and be snug against all parts of baby’s body (not just the shoulders).

Avoid dressing your baby in thick clothing. Thick clothes or blankets can make it impossible to get the harness snug enough. Tighten the straps first. In cold weather, put a blanket *over*, not *under*, the straps.



Use the pinch test. If you can pinch the strap, it is not snug enough.

Resources

National Vehicle Safety Hotline: Get information and check recalls at 888-327-4236 or 800-424-9153 (tty), www.safercar.gov

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. Helpline: 800-745-7233, www.carseat.org

American Academy of Pediatrics: www.healthychildren.org

The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia: www.chop.edu/carseat

Find someone to help: 866-732-8243, or look online:

- www.seatcheck.org (select Inspection under Installation Help)
- <http://cert.safekids.org> (select Find a Tech)